Sept 30, 1966 (1)

Dear Mr. Weisberg

Thanks for the letter. Through an annoying oversight, it was forwarded to me only a few days ago. Thus, by now it is probably too late to use any information on autopsies that I might have gotten. Still, I figured it would be better to make some effort. My results are meager. In the statutes for Arizona, Colorado and New Jersey, provisions are made for a coroner (or possibly medical examiner), and his powers and duties outlined. No details are given as to autopsy procedures, beyond "taking all necessary measures to discover cause of death", and similar generalities. The only real details appear in a list of information to be put on the death certificate. The Oakland Coroner's office said that there are no specific rules or minimal requirements for the autopsy, & that the quality of work done varies from place to place. (Obviously!) They recommended Dr. Jesse Carr, a big expert on such matters, & he confirmed that there are no legal minimum requirements. As for text books, the best is "Legal Medicine, Pathology & (Toxicology)", by Gonzalez, Vance & Halprin, Appetton-Century-Crofts. A professor Rose (or Russ) Fischer of the University of Maryland, also recently wrote a good book. He would probably be a good man to see. I found it impossible to summarize all the details in Gonzalez, et al, as to autopsy procedure. It occupies a whole chapter (5), & is very explicit. Another doctor told me that in the state of Utah, till recently, "coroner conditions" were deplorable. Often a dead body would be found, obviously murdered, but would be buried without an autopsy, & death listed as due to "natural but unknown causes".

After a long fight, recently a medical examiner system was introduced. The funeral directors fought this. For one thing, autopsies are not compatible with "viewing the body". Also, the law provided that the body remain at the scene of death until the legal examiner arrived. In rural areas, this might take awhile, entailing decomposition + putrefaction, also bad for the morticians.

Am enclosing an article by Dr Carr, which will probably be of no use whatsoever. Finally, in the July 1966 (vol 11, No 3) Journal of Forensic Sciences, there are several articles dealing with the Warren commission. [[The address of the journal is

c/o Callaghan + Co, 165 N. Archer Ave, Mundelein Illinois 60060]]

In particular, one article complained that of the three JFK autopsy surgeons, only Finck was qualified (!). The article was annoyed that the Forensic Pathologists were not consulted.

Well, this isn't very good or useful. Fortunately, I am confident that the whole question is just a minor detail in your work. I hope everything turns out well.

Yours Truly, Gene Lewis.

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